

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5122

As Passed Senate, February 22, 1995

Title: An act relating to the number of district court judges.

Brief Description: Changing the number of district court judges in Benton and Douglas counties.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Law & Justice (originally sponsored by Senators Smith, Hale, Long and Loveland).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Law & Justice: 1/24/95, 1/26/95 [DPS].
Passed Senate, 2/22/95, 47-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5122 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Smith, Chair; C. Anderson, Vice Chair; Hargrove, Haugen, Johnson, Long, Quigley, Rinehart, Roach and Schow.

Staff: Dick Armstrong (786-7460)

Background: By statute the Legislature determines the number of district court judges in each county. Benton County has experienced growth in the number of cases filed and tried in its district courts, in addition to adding the city of Prosser to its district court jurisdiction.

The Washington State Administrator for the Courts has conducted a "weighted caseload" study and estimates that Benton County needs another district court judge to handle the current caseload.

District courts are responsible for expenses relating to salary, capital construction, support staff, and other costs associated with operating a district court.

Legislation enacted in 1994 mistakenly authorized two district court positions for Douglas County.

Summary of Bill: An additional district court judge is authorized for Benton County, increasing the number of district court judges in the county from two to three. Douglas County is authorized to have one district court judge.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 20, 1995.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: The workload for Benton County has increased substantially and another district court judge is needed. The statute should be amended to reflect the correct number of district court judges in Douglas County.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Judge Eugene Pratt, Benton County (pro); Chuck Foster, Office of the Administrator for the Courts (pro).